

# IN DEFENCE OF QUDS

Since the occupation of Jerusalem in the 1967 war, Israel has used many tactics to change its Islamic identity. Extremist Jews wanted to blow up and destroy Al Aqsa mosque and replace it with a Jewish temple.

BY P K NIAZ

The State of Israel was created in 1948 after driving out the Palestinians and grabbing their land in an inhuman way. Since then the Zionist movement and its leaders have adopted a policy to expand its borders through wars and occupation. During the six-day war in 1967 Israel captured West Bank, Golan Heights and Sinai Peninsula which were parts of Jordan, Syria and Egypt respectively. Israel's first invasion of Sinai was during the Suez crisis in 1956. After signing the Camp David Treaty with Egypt, the first peace agreement with any Muslim nation, Israel withdrew from entire Sinai region. The final status of the Gaza Strip, which was also taken over by Israel during the war was not discussed in the treaty. In 2005 Israel unilaterally withdrew from Gaza and it is now under the control of Palestinian resistance movement, Hamas. However, occupation in West Bank and Golan Heights has been going on for the past 45 years.

Israel's occupation of East Jerusalem, which is part of the West Bank, stands as the bone of contention in the Palestinian issue. Palestinians who seek an independent state want the holy land of Quds (Jerusalem), home to Islam's third holiest mosque, Al Aqsa, as its capital. Israelis, on the other hand is adamant that Jerusalem is an integral part of Israel and are not ready to give up its status. In 1980 the government passed the 'Jerusalem Law' that declared all of Jerusalem 'complete and united capital' of Israel. The United Nations till this date has not recognised this Israeli decision and the UN Security Council has passed seven resolutions declaring the annexation as null and void. According to international law, East Jerusalem is an occupied territory and the land cannot be acquired by means of annexation.

Except Central American nation Costa Rica no countries recognised the annexation of East Jerusalem, and those who maintained embassies in Tel Aviv did not move them to Jerusalem. However, the US Congress in 1995 passed the Jerusalem Embassy Act, which recognises Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and instructs the government to relocate the US embassy to there from Tel Aviv. The bill has been waived by Presidents Clinton, Bush and Obama on national security grounds.

History says the first people to settle in Palestine were the Canaanites. They were an Arab tribe who came to Palestine from the Arabian Peninsula. Jerusalem remained a non-Jewish city for a long time. The Jews believe that it was King David who captured Jerusalem from the Canaanites and he converted it into a Jewish land. The Crusaders invaded and ruled over Jerusalem for almost 90 years. In 1187, the city was liberated from the Crusaders by the Islamic



Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem.

warrior, Salahuddeen Ayyubi who permitted Jews and Muslims to return and settle in the city.

Al Aqsa is the second mosque on earth and was built 40 years after the construction of the Grand Mosque in Makkah. Most scholars are of the opinion that Al Aqsa was first built by the first Prophet Adam and it was rebuilt by Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and later by Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) who finally completed the building of Al Aqsa mosque. This structure was destroyed by Babylon King Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC. The Jews consider Al Aqsa built by Prophet Sulaiman as their Temple and re-built a new structure on the same site in 167 BC, but it was destroyed in 70 AD by the Roman army led by Titus and the Jews were banished from Jerusalem.

The site of Al Aqsa mosque remained barren and was used as a rubbish tip for nearly 600 years until the Caliph Umar bin Khattab, the second successor of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), liberated Jerusalem in 637 AD. It was Umar who began the foundation of Al Aqsa and a small mosque was built. Respect for other faiths was manifest in Islamic Jerusalem. Umar insisted that the three Abrahamic faiths coexist. He refused to pray in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher when he was escorted around the city by the Greek Orthodox Patriarch. Had he done so, he explained, the Muslims would have wanted to build a mosque.

The religious significance of Al Aqsa mosque is the fact that Muslims were commanded to turn towards this mosque in Jerusalem for prayer, before the Kabah in Makkah was declared as the qiblah (the direction to which Muslim pray). This was the practice until 16 to 17 months after the Muslims' emigration to Madinah during the Prophet's time. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "Set out deliberately on a journey only to three mosques: this mosque of mine (in Madinah), the Sacred Mosque (in Makkah), and Al Aqsa Mosque (in Jerusalem)." (Al Bukhari). The Prophet also stressed the value and importance of prayer offered in Al Aqsa mosque.

Over the centuries under various kings and colonial rulers, Muslims had full control over Al Aqsa mosque. Since the occupation of Jerusalem in the 1967 war, Israel has used many tactics to change its Islamic identity. Extremist Jews wanted to blow up and destroy Al Aqsa mosque and replace it with a Jewish Temple. They have made more than hundred

It is a Zionist strategy to project the Dome of the Rock (Qubbat Al Sakhra), a gold-domed structure in the centre of the Noble Sanctuary, particularly in photographs, to draw the attention away from Al Aqsa mosque. The Dome of the Rock is the structure built over the rock, from which Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) started his Night Journey. However, they are both on the same site, which is called Bayt Al Maqdis.

attempts to destroy the Noble Sanctuary since the occupation. They even set fire the 900-year-old pulpit installed by Salahuddeen Ayyubi. The construction of tunnels that took place in 1977, 1984 and 2007 were damaging to the structure of the Al Aqsa mosque.

A study conducted by Al Aqsa Foundation for Endowment and Heritage in Israel has revealed that the mosque and its surrounding area were subjected to around 100 attacks and violations in 2011 alone. The study documented provocative statements constituting incitement by Israelis to damage the third holiest site in the Muslim world. The report claims that around 5,000 Israelis, including Jewish settlers and members of other extremist groups, stormed into Al Aqsa in 2011. There has also been an escalation in the frequency of incursions by Israeli intelligence officers and political and official figures into Al Aqsa Mosque. Such a provocative visit by the then Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon in September 2000 inside the mosque compound had caused the beginning of the second Intifada.

Preventing Muslims from entering the mosque and acts aimed at decreasing their presence in the Noble Sanctuary through banning orders and limiting entry to certain age groups are some of the measures which are in force. The Israeli authorities also prevent millions of Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip from reaching Jerusalem and pray in Al Aqsa. Recently an official at the Jerusalem City Council called for closing the Al Aqsa mosque for worshippers in an attempt to pressure Muslims into accepting the demolishing of the bridge of the historic

Al Maghraba Gate that leads to the mosque. Israel has plans to transform the area around Al Aqsa into so-called 'Talmudic gardens', which will incorporate tourist centres and commercial shopping malls.

As part of its efforts to Judaize Jerusalem, the Israeli Interior Ministry revoked the residency of 5,584 Palestinians in the last three years, a Palestinian human rights organisation said recently. The Jerusalem Center for Social and Economic Rights said that the Israeli Interior Ministry revoked the residency of 14,466 Palestinians in Jerusalem since the occupation of the city in 1967. This report was based on data it received from the Israeli ministry. Around 70,000 Arabs are under the threat of losing their residency in Jerusalem since they now live east of the wall that separates the disputed city from the occupied West Bank. The United Nations has criticised Israel's move to change the demographic structure of Jerusalem in several resolutions. Israel also started replacing the Arabic names of streets, quarters and historical sites with Hebrew names.

It is in this background, Qatar is hosting the International Conference for the Defence of Jerusalem. The conference will feature issues of Jerusalem and international law, history of Jerusalem, Jerusalem and settlements, Israeli violations, Jerusalem, and civil society organisations. The summit deals with the legal status of Jerusalem before and after the occupation, the reality and the future of Jerusalem under occupation, and the status of the holy places under international law. The conference will highlight the status of Jerusalem to prove the illegality of the Israeli practices in the holy city and its violation of all international norms and conventions.

In many international forums Qatar has voiced its stance on the Palestinian issue and strongly condemned Israeli moves to Judaize Jerusalem. Last April, while addressing the Los Angeles World Affairs Council meeting, the Emir H H Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani reiterated Qatar's stand on the Palestinian issue, by stressing that the country was in support of a just and lasting peace through the implementation of relevant international resolutions. The most important of these resolutions are the inadmissibility of the occupation of territory by force, and the respect for the principle of the right to self-determination and Israel's withdrawal from Palestinian territories, in addition to the establishment of an independent, sovereign and viable Palestinian state with Al Quds (Jerusalem) as its capital.